The Contemporary Disintegration
of Aesthetic Utopia and Its Paradoxical Form[*]

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With the advent of the era of aesthetic capitalism in the late 20th century, aesthetics and art exude enormous political potential. In contemporary aesthetic field, Utopia is breaking through the existing model and disintegrating into the paradoxical "Heterotopia" or "Dystopia (anti-utopia)" with its revolutionary and negative power. It engages in politics, society and life with its reflexivity and anew assesses and activates aesthetical language and perceptive experience. The popularity of the engagement of aesthetics and art is the new modeling road of Utopia after its contemporary disintegration.

Keywords: aesthetic utopia heterotopia, dystopia contemporary disintegration paradoxical form

The original "rosy prospect", "ideal national prosperity", "flawless living environment" and other commendatory meanings of More's Utopia are in gradual recession. The negative power contained in it gradually becomes prominent. In the early phase of capitalism, utopian socialists stigmatized Utopia with "fancy", "daydream", "unpractical" and "fantasy". The setback of socialism in the 20th century made utopianism become a failed political practice and be negated and queried. Utopianism was mauled heavily. *The End of Utopia* of American historian Jacoby stated that: "we shall not think about the proposition 'eradicate all pains of human' any more. In addition, it can reveal less and less evaluable things. This just indicates the end of Utopia." Being different from the utopianism in political practice field, aesthetic Utopia is a critical weapon created by western Marxism. Weber firstly solved the problem "how to achieve aesthetic salvation". Many scholars of Frankfurt school and Althusserian school learnt quintessence from his thought. In the framework of Marxist philosophy, aesthetic criticism was carried out to western advanced industrial society. Kinds of criticism theory based on "aesthetic salvation" formed. Lukács used "narrative Utopia" with the core generality principle to explore the future development of human. Bloch put forward "promising Utopia" in "not yet" significance to give prominence to Utopia's tendency and potential to the unfulfilled perfect society. Habermas devoted himself to pursuing utopianism in communication community; Marcuse put forward "new-type Utopia"; Adorno put forward "negation-type Utopia"; and Jameson regarded Utopia as the planning weapon in culture field. They offered strategies and plans at different layers and dimensions for internal problems of Utopia. Reflexive disintegration of contemporary aesthetic Utopia happens and it exists in the paradox of

"Heterotopia" and "anti-Utopia". Aesthetic capitalism era externally drives the disintegration of aesthetic Utopia. While contemporary aesthetics transfers to politics, Utopia separates itself from the criticism of classical Marxists to capitalism culture, breaks through the confinement of radical politics in western Marxism aesthetics and enters cotemporary aesthetic problem field with negative and revolutionary power.

Aesthetic Dystopia

After classical Marxism criticized the illusion of Utopia and western Marxism could not achieve aesthetic Utopia and became pessimistic, a large batch of ideologists anew placed hope on Utopia based on the contemporary social environment. These thoughts are converging to be new "utopianism". Jameson thought the new utopianism "can awake the sleeping part of the thought, awake the retrogressive organs in political, historical and social imagination and awake the revolutionary spirit lost owing to long-term sluggishness."Traditional Utopia encounters disintegration in contemporary era and exists in the forms "Heterotopia" and "Dystopia".

The concept of "Dystopia" or "anti-Utopia" was put forward by Johu Stuart Mill in 1868. In etymology, "Dystopia" is comprised of "dys" and "topia". Latinetyma "dys" derived from Greek "dus" which means "bad" and "abnormal". It is combined with "topia" which indicates "place". So it means the contrary or opposition of Utopia. In fact, "Dystopia" emerged in More's *Utopia*short time after it was put forward. Looking back on the original "Utopia blueprint", it was put forward because people dreamed of ancient "perfect society". More's "new island of Utopia" promised to give people a "flourishing world" and a "world in pure harmonious status". "All members live together in peace and love each other without physical pain, any desire, anxiety, inferior labor, jealousy, depression or unfair or violent treatment. The life is eternal with warm climate and sunlight shining on the whole world. People live in infinitely abundant nature. " The perfection of Utopia blueprint is undisputed but the realistic society is defective and imperfect. Mannheim regarded Utopia as an illusory concept which influenced the foundation of society, understood it to be an ideology and thought it was social critical power in essence. In his opinion, Utopia negated and discarded injustice. He once affirmed "if one thought does not accord with realistic condition, this thought is Utopia." This means Utopia criticizes imperfect reality rather than looks forward to the future. In other words, the awareness of criticism is transmitted through creating an imaginary world which does not accord with the reality. From a series of words which describe Utopia, we can find "negative sentence pattern" is usually used. This may imply that Utopia is a whole set of concept or thought based on negatory thinking. It endows reverse characters to specific era or society from negatory layer. However, we can see the paradox of Utopia and reality from the theory of traditional Utopia: Based on the dissatisfaction with reality, people hope and try to create an ideal and perfect place but they will never achieve their goal. Once the ultimate goal of Utopia is achieved, it will indicate imperfection in reverse.

In the whole 20th century, it was a difficulty to solve people's dissimilation problem for withstanding the industrial society of capitalism. Western intellectuals raised criticism to challenge and query western rationalism traditional. Frenchscholar Tzvetan Todorov described this historical fact: "experiencing the massacre of two world wars, the totalitarian system built by Europe and other places and the fatal consequence caused by scientific and technological invention, the 20th century brought a decisive negation to all hopes formed before. They did not rely on enlightenment any more. The thoughts related to humanitarianism, relief, progress, free will and so on have fallen into discredit." While mentioning the 20th century, Czesław Milosz said: "This is a century filled with Utopia hope. People die in its name and mutually kill in its name."

The reversed disintegration of Utopia indicates the "evil of rationality" of modern society and completely reveals the paradox or reflexivity of Utopia. The "evil of rationality" of modern society derives from the abuse of technology out of control. In one aspect, technical rationality makes the free and creative people lose their rationality and be thoroughly materialized and dissimilated. In another aspect, the excessive control and supervision of scientific rationality hastens the appearance of totalitarian politics. Horkheimer thought that "the myth of the 20th century and the non-rationality of belief always make the society thoroughly crash into the rational activity of the people enlightened in brutal period."Auschwitz Concentration Camp is the realistic existence of rational self-negation. From the reason of its appearance, "Auschwitz is not the common brutish nature of human but a repeatable matter. It presents organizational responsibility related to objective necessity. This responsibility cannot be recognized. Eventually, irresponsibility is revealed." As a place thoroughly ruining Utopia, Auschwitz Concentration Camp has systematization in high degree and perfect technology, which indicates rationality can bring disaster besides well-being. The Utopia anticipated by people during hundreds of years showed its tyrannical appearance in the century. Herbert Marcuse clearly formulated the duality of technical rationality: "technical progress = the increase of social wealth (namely the increase of Gross National Product) = the expansion of enslavement" This indicates the combination of technical rationality and politics successfully dispels the dissenting opinions in society and suppresses the negativity, criticalness and transcendence in the mind of the public.

"Dystopia" or "anti-Utopia" philosophical thought activated the literary creations in the 20th century. For example, the works of Eugene Zamiatin, Aldous Huxley and George Orwell clearly presented their thought in theme. These literary creations were called "anti-Utopia novels".The literary expression pattern created by them "draws an awful picture for the society without any friction: the difference among people is eliminated (weakened at least) as far as possible there. Diversified human's temperaments, habits and ideals—briefly speaking, the flow of life—are ruthlessly simplified to be in the same pattern and compressed into a straitjacket of the society and politics. It suppresses people in the name of monism and makes the dream about perfect and static social order suffer setback and damage and become an aught." In other words, these works presented the bleak scene of utopianism after it encountered heavy maul and disastrous defeat in realistic world: namely people's discomfort and struggle in technical rationality and totalitarian politics. For example, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* reflected the centralization of state power and despotism of the Soviet Union at that time. *Brave New World* criticized scientism to be a powerful tool controlling individuals' freedom and causing "dehumanization". In Eugene Zamiatin's explanation to the theme of *We*, it was not correct to simply regard the work as a political satire.

Anti-Utopia novels inversely wrote Utopia in the form literature to make people anew think about the issue of rationality and modern technology from another angle. Just as the reveal of Horkheimer and Adorno, enlightenment can become anti-enlightenment because of its own dialectics. Science, rationality and democracy can also go to their respective opposite. Therefore, based on the radical negation and query to science, rationality and progress, Utopia achieves its disintegration in its process of reflexivity. Dystopia and anti-Utopia remind us to rethink realistic world and future imagination from the angles of negative dialectics and negative aesthetics. Of course, the transformation of the Dystopia in literature is indivisible from the flourish of science fiction in the 21st century. It is notable that "Dystopia" does not only exist at philosophy layer and literature layer. The fields of social life, politics, economy, family, religion, morality, nature, science and technology have the sign of Dystopia. From the expressive meaning of Utopia, it implies paradox: the

pursuit to Utopia derives from the imagination "perfection" on it. However, certain perfection means termination or standstill.

Aesthetic Heterotopia

In etymology, Heterotopia derives from Greek and it is comprised of "hetero" ("different", "other") and "topia" (place). Its literal meaning is "a different place". Sometimes it is translated to be "heterogeneous space" or "Heterotopia". In the preface of Foucault's work *The Order of Things*, he stated that Heterotopia damaged the established syntaxes of language and weakened the corresponding relation between "words" and "things". "Heterotopia (such as the Heterotopia we usually find from Jorge Luis Borges) exhausts language, makes words stagnate and suspects all possibility of the origin of grammar. Heterotopia cracks our myth and makes the lyricism of our sentences dull and boring." As the metaphor of an epistemology, Heterotopia reveals and breaks the internal mechanism of cognitive system that perceptive world relies on. Then it transfers to the order space filled with fracture and interspace. The metaphorical features of "Heterotopia" indicated Foucault's space theory began to transfer from "metaphor" to "society" in certain degree. In subsequent *Of the Other Space or Different Spaces,* Foucault queried traditional linear view of history and replaced it with fractured, discontinued and occasional view of history through practical survey on utterance. This spatialized view of history involves differences and heterogeneous elements. Just as what Foucault once said, we lived in a complex compound integrating linear time and net space. Heterotopia is just the relation net of the heterogeneous space. As for the relationship between "Utopia" and "Heterotopia", the former is only an imaginary and unreal base. It is reverse to real space. In essence, it is unreal space. Comparing with unreal "Utopia", "Heterotopia" (or heterogeneous space) is the real space and the space to be surveyed and achieved. If Utopia has no foundation of its existence and it is just a pure imagination, Heterotopia is real and resists realistic society and culture. Foucault once stated: "real sites may exist in all cultures and all civilizations—really exist and form during the establishment of society—these real sites are the Utopia really achieved. All real sites which can be found in culture are manifested, controversial and also reversed. These sites are completely different from those reflected and discussed by them. Therefore, I call them Heterotopia, comparing with Utopia." We can see the ideal flourishing world of "Utopia" built in traditional concept of Utopia was completely reversed by Foucault. The realistic world was thoroughly overturned. It disintegrated to be a special heterogeneous space at edge and boundary. Fracture was generated among presentations of things and abnormal logic space operation was presented. Georges Bataille who paid close attention to heterogeneity offered forceful explanation to this. In his opinion, "homogeneity corresponds to the measurability of logic form while heterogeneity corresponds to illogical chaos; homogeneity corresponds to functional products while heterogeneity corresponds to autonomic force; homogeneity incorporates elements into an orderly and effective operating machine while heterogeneity incorporates those the society cannot assimilate" Meanwhile, Foucault used "mirror" to interpret the mixture feature of "Heterotopia": Heterotopia was the Utopia achieved but not the real Utopia. It was characterized with heterogeneity and scattering. The Utopia in reality was cracked.

As an important thought resource of space theory, Heterotopia vengages in politics, literature, art and even culture field in production space. From the theory source of Utopia and Heterotopia, the latter is the spiritual extension of the former in space dimension. From the generation of the "ideal country" of Plato of ancient Greek to More's "the new island of Utopia", Campanella's "Sun City", Bacon's "the New Atlantis" and the "Pantisocracy" described in *The Book of Rites* of China, the heterogeneous space of Utopia existed "on the spot"

of "absence" all the time. In the contemporary era filled with heterogeneity and otherness, the social space which cannot be achieved in traditional reality is filled with realistic possibility. In other words, as a space framework, Heterotopia continues the appeal of traditional Utopia. Being influenced by contemporary cultural context, the stable and homogeneous Utopia can be disintegrated into innumerable Heterotopia spaces which are difficult to interconnect mutually. In certain degree, "Heterotopia" can be called the contemporary disintegration form of Utopia. "Heterotopia" is generated at the opposite of Utopia. Its concrete space forms can be forbidden area, graveyard, barrack, museum, prison, library, holiday village and so on. In addition, the conducts of daily life containing heterogeneity can be included in Heterotopia, such as mirroring, memory, taboos and some behaviors deviating from daily life. Taking contemporary museum as an example, this space form can most reflect the representation system and production &practice relationship of Heterotopia. Space is the symbol of culture andauthority. Knowledge entity is produced and modeled in the space divided by authority. In the museums with the theme "women" in some societies, the "crisis Heterotopia" and "deviation Heterotopia" in Foucault significance are prominent. Women Culture Museum especially pays attention to the groups in crisis or deviation status or even the groups which deviate from mainstream culture. In the cultural sites of some small societies oppressed by culture, the attention paid to women and their culture forms the culture of Heterotopia. With the double peculiarities "authenticity" and "illusion", Heterotopia transcends traditional Utopia in space production through the practice of utterance and authority. In other words, the transcendence of Heterotopia extends space issue to culture, politics and other social dimensions.

Foucault liberated his philosophical thought to the society in completely new utterance research pattern and practice pattern. The traditional metaphysic questions (such as "what is thought", "how shall we think" and so on) in philosophical field were answered by Foucault one by one and transferred to be: what's the object we think about and perceive. Foucault's partition to visible things, appreciable things and the things which could be thought about anew activated contemporary left-wing ideologists' thinking about the relevance between principal part and the world. Ranciere called the supplement of aesthetics to ethic "Heterotopia". Being different from the thought of Foucault, this Heterotopia based on experience was established on the mechanism of the redistribution of perception. It appeared in "others" form, such as format, status or capability reconfiguration. Being enlightened by the thoughts "non-continuity", "crevice" and "fracture" in the theory of Foucault, Ranciere abandoned consecutive linear historicism attitude and successively put forward three art identifying systems to lay foundation for his aesthetics theory. The first and second were the moral system and reappearance system of art, respectively. The former derived from Plato theory. While emphasizing the social function value of art, art's imitation of reality was criticized. The latter derived from the criticism of Aristotle to Plato. It was thought that art was not pure imitation. Art was separated from skill and other modes of production and therefore became an internal grade which was not mechanical handicraft or free art. As for the third, namely the aesthetics system of art, it was what Ranciere really favored. Ranciere affirmed that the aesthetics system of art was the aesthetic revolution to the reappearance system of art. Aesthetics system separates from the imitation principle of reappearance system, bridges the gap between art and daily world and advocates that daily affairs can be involved in the field of art. Its core points to sensible basis of the society, namely the distribution of the sensible. Ranciere said art could anew get its distribution pattern between the visible and the invisible and between the sensible and the insensible in the form "dissensus", namely the conflict among significance perception modes. The task of aesthetics is to separate the insensible from the sensible.

Ranciere's theory of art system overturned the art self-discipline view since modern aesthetics appeared. In art system, aesthetics allied with politics and promised to finally establish an aesthetic community or sense community. Eagleton disguised aesthetics to be ideology to elucidate the politics of aesthetics. Differently, Ranciere firmly believed that contemporary aesthetics was inseparable from politics; aesthetics involved the distribution of the sensible and we were facing the politics with increasing aestheticization. Radically speaking, the aesthetics with the distribution of the sensible is the aesthetics of politics. The increasingly prominent aesthetics-politics engagement timely responded to the censure of aesthetic "termination of Utopia" since postmodernism. In this significance, the aesthetic community in contemporary art is the "aesthetic Heterotopia" created by Ranciere. As a new sense mechanism, it anew allocates the existing sensible order and structures the texture of common experience through "dissensus". The principal part gets new liberation and equality. "Aesthetic Heterotopia" continues the thought of traditional Utopia but its basis is the perceptual space with the core "community". It is another scheme for achieving Utopia. Preset aesthetics can achieve aesthetic equality. Art has the potential of political liberation.

The Engagement of Aesthetic Utopia into Society

In contemporary context, Utopia shows its great political potential in the process of reflexivity and disintegration. Meanwhile, the revolutionary force contained in art and aesthetics will drive aesthetic Utopia as contemporary new model of Utopia to enter new field. What's the role of Utopia for intervening in life on earth? How to deal with the complex relations among aesthetics, art, politics and real life? This is complex. As a new aesthetic spirit and theoretical utterance, "engagement" offers us the philosophical thinking route for rethinking the problems of aesthetic Utopia after the contemporary disintegration. The former president Arnold Berleant of International Association for Aesthetics clearly put forward "engagement" thought in his aesthetics theory. In his opinion, "'aesthetic engagement' is an intense appreciative concentration. It makes sure that aesthetic appreciation needs the active participation of percipients who shall not only concentrate on objects or incidents but also endow the process with vitality and stimulate to achieve it." The aesthetic engagement of Berleant emphasized the subject of aesthetics, namely the participation degree of appreciators in aesthetic experience. This challenged Kant's concept that aesthetics had no advantages or disadvantages and the tradition of self-discipline aesthetics since the 18th century. In his opinion, Kant's concept that aesthetics had no advantages or disadvantages broke the relation between art and society. In fact, the earliest theorist presenting "engagement" thought is Schiller. His aesthetics has the peculiarity of engagement and it is widely focused on in contemporary era. Schiller opposed violent revolution and tried to replace political revolution with aesthetic game and revolution. This Utopia thought greatly enlightens contemporary scholars to think about the political engagement of aesthetic Utopia. Ranciere followed Schiller's "aesthetic revolution" and thought that art recognition lay in the institutional factor existing in external society. He returned art recognition to human's experience field, engaged it into society and made it become a political issue in reality.

The great reform force in Utopia stimulates itself to evolve to be a practical activity happening in social public life through the engagement in politics in contemporary era. In concrete practical fields, Utopia is engaged in politics, daily life, urban culture, clothing, film, literature, architecture, drama, music and some other fields of art and life. Carter, the former president of International Association for Aesthetics, once surveyed the slum of Rio de Janeiro and analyzed the contemporary form of Utopia community. With the theory foundation of Dussel's Liberation Theology, he thought Dussel's Utopia and Adorno's future Utopia

were totally different. The Utopia was built in the daily life encircling the public. "Friendliness" is a core key word which refers to "non-space eternity". In other words, it is "a grand meeting of the people who advocate equality, freedom and just idea and a grand meeting of the people who vehemently oppose counterrevolutionary or restoration of a dethroned monarch and favor order." As a practical living style and thought concept, slum challenges "metaphysics" of traditional Utopia and the limitation of political Utopia. Here, the concrete performance of popular music, street handwriting and mural changes and a new models aesthetic order and slum dwellers' mode of perceiving the world. Then they can be activated to create and present constructive and positive life. Meanwhile, the creation of slum "Utopia community" needs the skills and ability of the public, such as trust, unity and reciprocity. The engagement of art and aesthetics in life greatly stimulates the update and change of the life concept of slum. The force of "Utopia community" with the concrete space slum symbolizes residents' experiencing based on hope and the practical action of pursuing good life. In other words, it is a life based on people's expectation and intimate feeling of good life.

In the field of costume, Aleš Erjavec took the pioneer art in the 20th century as an example and stated that the "overall" popularized in the 20th century was closely related to Utopia when its design was started. The concrete performance could be "tuta" of Italy and "prozadezhda" of Russia. These two kinds of costume emphasized art's function of engagement in society and the importance of industrial production. Meanwhile, both of them were based on the ideology of modernism. The purpose was to invent the commodities which could meet people's needs. In addition, the commodities could simultaneously eliminate the class difference in society and transform state to be an enormous political party. In this significance, the appearance of new overall protruded the vision of Italian futurists and Russian constructivists about "Utopia imagination" and simultaneously represented the successful case that modernism Utopia was engaged in real life and politics. In Ales'work *Aesthetic Revolutions and the Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde Movements*, the performance of Utopia in contemporary pioneer art was discussed in detail. He stated that aesthetics was engaged in politics in evolutionary mode. Radically, social reform and the construction of future were completed in the form of aesthetic revolution. It could be even described to be "aesthetics is revolutionary in essence."In his opinion, "the distribution of the sensible" put forward by Ranciere could well explain the purpose of the pioneer movement happening in the 20th century. Ales adopted "aesthetic revolution" of Schiller to stated that aesthetic pioneer movement devoted to driving aesthetic revolution and the purpose was to radically influence and change our mode of experiencing and perceiving the world. In addition, it adjusted our mode of recognizing and experiencing the reality by necessary means. Peter Begel once said: "through historical pioneer movement, the engagement of art in politics was radically changed. In addition, art was not simply eliminated but transformed to living practice." In contemporary era, aesthetic Utopia performs itself in contemporary pioneer art and protrudes its significance in the mixture with politics. The contemporary disintegration of Utopia is like the "sublation" stated by Peter Begel. Utopia does not disappear but transform to living practice with special appearance.

In everlasting argument about the theory of aesthetics is the relationship between art and society. Western Marxism scholar Adorno firmly stated that art was "the social antithesis of the society". He emphasized the self-discipline of art and rejected the concept "political art". In other words, the negation to existing society was profoundly criticized. Being different from Adorno's "oppose engagement", art and aesthetics become special capital in "cultural and economic era" or "aesthetic capitalism era". In specific scene, they can transform to be economic capital, political capital, cultural capital and symbolic capital. In the combination of art and fashion,

whether does the independence and criticism of aesthetic activities exist? If the feature of capitalism society in its climax is aesthetic capitalism, how to transform aesthetic activity to be the impetus of economic development on earth? Signs indicate that "aesthetics does not belong to superstructure but belong to economic base." The political transformation of contemporary aesthetics stimulates the alignment of art, aesthetics and politics. In addition, it is constantly engaged in social reality. However, this engagement is different from the aesthetic Utopia stated by Adorno and Herbert Marcuse. The Utopia after disintegration profoundly expresses the relationship between politics and aesthetics in contemporary cultural context.

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